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PERSONAL NARRATIVE

OF AN

EXCURSION TO THE HOSPICE

OF THE

GREAT ST. BERNARD.

BY

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READ BEFORE

THE LIVERPOOL LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

2050

LIVERPOOL:

PRINTED BY J. ROSE, SOUTH CASTLE STREET.

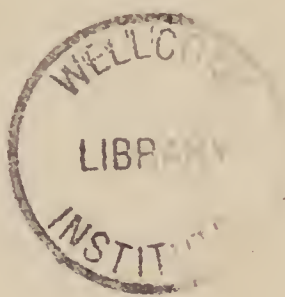
1846.

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“ Above me are the Alps,
The palaces of Nature, whose vast walls
Have pinnaeled in clouds their snowy scalps,
And throned Eternity in icy halls
Of cold sublimity, where forms and falls
The avalanche—the thunderbolt of snow!
All that expands the spirit, yet appals,
Gather around these summits, as to show
How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below.”

CHILDE HAROLD.



PERSONAL NARRATIVE.

THE subject which I have chosen is rather a hacknied one. The mountain pass which I am about to climb, steep and rugged though it be, has oft been trodden by other feet; the objects which I propose to describe have been looked upon by other eyes; and the thoughts and feelings which they awaken detailed by abler and more eloquent pens than mine; but still, as human minds differ from each other, and similar objects yet fail to produce upon them similar impressions, I am not without hope, that, even although nothing original may be elicited in the ensuing narrative, old, familiar faces may, at least, be exhibited from new points of view; and thoughts and feelings, with which we are already conversant, be found to have acquired, in passing through another mind, something of the peculiarity which attaches to each individual intellect.

To those who are familiar with the scenery of the Alps, and have a taste for, and a sympathy with, the beauties of external nature, I need not speak of the charms which invest every feature in these romantic regions. The rich fertility of the sheltered valleys, where, in summer, beneath the glowing influence of a tropical temperature, vegetation expands in varied forms of beauty and luxuriance; the wild sterility of the mountain passes, where the vine and the oak have given place to the mosses and the ferns, and the blue chalice of the gentian may be descried amidst the scanty herbage, or the crimson clusters of the rhododendron fringing the line of perpetual snow; the elastic buoyancy of the atmosphere in these lofty elevations, beneath whose exhilarating influence the pulses madly leap, and we seem to inhale at each draught the very spirit of freedom; the awful grandeur of the mountain gorges, hemmed in by craggy rocks, their bases washed by foaming torrents, their shelving sides painted with the varied hues of the lichen, and their summits crowned by the pendant foliage of the pine; the yawning chasms spanned by fragile bridges, hung, cobweb-like, between heaven and earth, evidencing at once the ingenuity and enterprise of man; the wide expanse of the silver lakes, in whose tranquil depths are reflected the dark shadows of the everlasting hills: the vivid contrast afforded by all that is lovely and luxuriant in vegetable life being brought into immediate contact with all that is chilling and sterile, as the eye glances from the verdant depth of a sunny

vale to the frozen pinnacle of some rugged mountain, or ranges from the blue waters of lake Leman, and the smiling slopes of Lausanne and Vevay, to the wild heights of the Salèves and the eternal snows of Mont Blanc.

Visions such as these, and the emotions which they cannot fail to awaken, must be seen and felt ere they can be appreciated; and the remembrance of them must endure while taste remains to enjoy what is beautiful and sublime, and memory lives to recal the scenes which have afforded us such delight. Those who, like myself, have been familiar with rural nature from their earliest years—who have lived and revelled amidst her ever-varying and yet uncloying beauties—will best know how to appreciate and excuse this enthusiasm of feeling. To those, if such there be, who can neither understand nor sympathise with such emotions, I can only say, with regret, that constitution or circumstances have debarred them from some of the purest and most elevated enjoyments of which human nature is susceptible.

Before entering upon the ascent to the Hospice, it may not be uninteresting to premise a brief sketch of the past history of this charitable foundation. Louis le Debonnaire, (814,) according to some, and Charlemagne, (768,) according to others, is said to have been the earliest founder of the Hospice. Bernard, uncle to the latter, and an illegitimate son of Charles Martel, led a division of the invading army of Charlemagne over the Great St. Bernard, when he went to attack Lombardy, and from him Saussure supposes that the present name of the pass may have been derived. But it is more probable that the Hospice owed its foundation and name to another Bernard, an illegitimate son of Pepin, who inherited the kingdom of Italy from Charlemagne, and whose interest it would be to preserve a communication with Gaul by this passage of the Alps; and there is evidence that a monastery existed on the Great St. Bernard previous to the year 851, a period anterior to the reign of Alfred the Great of England, 872. Simler mentions that Hartman, who was made bishop of Lausanne at the above date, had been previously chief of this monastery, and styles him “abbé and almoner of Mont Joux,” which was the ancient name of this pass, and is a Gallic corruption of *Mons Jovis*. Rivaz gives the name of even an earlier abbot of the convent, viz., Vultgaire, in 832, and it is stated in the annals of Bertin that Lothaire II. King of Lorraine, in 859, made a treaty with his brother, the Emperor Louis II. by which he ceded to him Geneva, Lausanne, and Sion, but specially reserved “l’Hospital du St. Bernard,” which proves, as Saussure remarks, the importance of this passage and the name which it bore.

The present Hospice was founded in 962, more than twenty years before the time of Hugh Capet, by Bernard, who was born of a noble family of Savoy, at the chateau of Meuthon, on the lake of Annecy, about midway between Geneva and Chambery. At an early age he determined to adopt an ecclesiastical life, and with this view went to the city of Aoste, in Piedmont, of which he afterwards became archdeacon. The coincidence of his name with that of the monastery probably induced him to re-establish the Hospice on Mont St. Joux, over which he presided himself. He founded at the same time the Hospice on the little St. Bernard, bestowing upon both the name of his favourite Saint, Nicolas de Myre, and consigning them to his protection as tutelary patron. By degrees the name of the devotee came to be asso-

ciated with that of the saint, and, after the canonization of Bernard, his name superseded all others, and has continued attached to the Hospice since 1123. Bernard died in 1008, before the period of the Norman Conquest, having governed the convent forty years. For some time after the death of Bernard the Hospice was exposed to frequent outrages from barbarians who traversed the mountains; and its records of the eleventh century present a succession of calamities. The monastery was subsequently burnt by the Saracens, who over-ran the country, carrying fire and sword even into the midst of these Alpine solitudes. The ruins became a stronghold of brigands, who plundered or exacted an exorbitant tribute from all passengers through a barrier which they erected on the Italian side of the pass. The Normans, having determined to expel these marauders, broke down the barrier and killed the guard; but the outrages still continuing, Canute, king of England and Denmark, (1017,) complained to the Pope and the Emperor of the atrocities which were committed in the Alps upon his subjects going on pilgrimage to Rome, who, in consequence, seldom ventured to traverse these mountains, unless in companies of four or five hundred persons. His complaints were listened to, the tolls of the passage were abolished, and the brigands expelled. Good order succeeded to outrage, and the convent was re-established. Canute, in consequence, wrote to his bishops and prelates, informing them that he had secured the safety of the pilgrims on the route of the Pennine Alps.

In the contests of the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa (1152) with Pope Alexander III. and Humbert, Count of Marienne, diplomas of protection were granted by them to the convent for the security of the persons and property which pertained to it, one of the very few instances in which emperors, sovereign pontiffs, and other distinguished persons, disputed the glory of fostering and protecting a foundation so important to humanity. Peace and security having been thus guaranteed to the monastery, it soon acquired great celebrity and opulence. So early as 1177, it possessed, in various dioceses, eighty-eight benefices, consisting of priories, cures, chateaux, and farms. It had also lands in Sicily, in Flanders, and in England. The climax of riches and importance was in 1480, when it possessed no less than ninety-eight cures alone; subsequently, however, the reformation, political changes in the states, loss of distant property, disputes with the Pope, with the neighbouring states, and with each other, reduced the monks to poverty, and compelled them even to beg for the means of subsistence. The very ground on which the Hospice stands has been the subject of disputes between neighbouring powers. Sardinia claimed it as hers, but the Valaisans established their right to it, as being within the diocese of Sion, by papal bulls from Leo X. (1513-1740) to Benedict XIV. The Hospice is, therefore, within the the canton of Valais, but the jurisdiction of the Switzers extends only a few hundred yards beyond the convent, where a column is erected to mark the Italian frontier. The state of Sardinia has not only despoiled the good brethren of St. Bernard of all their property within its bounds, but actually taxes them for the use which they make of the summer pasturage of the Vacherie, which is situated on the Italian side of the pass. Very little property in land now belongs to the Hospice, a vineyard at Clarens, and a farm

at Roche in the Pays de Vaud, are the principal. Their resources are small, and in aid of them collections are regularly made in the Swiss cantons.

Having given these historical details, I shall now proceed with the narrative of my visit to the Hospice. At six o'clock on a bright sunny morning, in July, 1836, I left the small town of Martigny in the Valais, accompanied by a relative who travelled with me, in a "Char à Côté," a rude sort of open vehicle, drawn by two mules. My friend, who had long resided in a tropical climate, was averse to the expedition from apprehension of the cold, and still more so from an impression conveyed to him by a traveller whom he met at Geneva, that there was nothing worthy of being seen at the Hospice, and that the worthy Monks were a pack of rude, lazy fellows, or, as Lord Byron politely designated them, "the miserable drones of an execrable superstition." How far these anticipations were correct, the sequel will show. For my own part, the monks and the dogs of St. Bernard were linked with some of my earliest remembrances; and, kindled by the narrative of their exploits and their perils in the cause of humanity, youthful fancy had depicted them, like knights errant of old, seeking to rescue the captive and console the unfortunate—not beneath the castle wall, or by the grate of the donjon keep, but amidst the blinding snow storm, and from beneath the ruins of the avalanche. And even at the risk of finding these pleasing visions of fancy dispelled by the sober realities of truth, I felt inclined to visit an institution which had been so long celebrated for its deeds of benevolence, and whose inmates had voluntarily devoted themselves to the gratuitous service of their fellow-men.

The distance from Martigny to the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard is about 14 Swiss leagues, or 35 English miles, and the ascent is considerable throughout the whole route. As far as the village of Liddes, which is about half-way, the road is practicable for wheeled carriages, but the rest of the journey is usually performed upon mule-back, and, on nearing the Hospice, many would prefer making their way on foot over the rocky fragments which strew the path, and through the half-melted snow, rather than trust themselves upon the back of a quadruped. For the sake of distinctness, I shall divide the route into several stages, noting at each the objects which seem worthy of remark, and subjoining any observation which these may suggest.

From Martigny to St. Branchier, a distance of five miles, the road runs in the immediate proximity of the Dranse, and crosses the stream three several times before reaching the last-named village. St. Branchier is situated at the junction of the Val de Bagne with the Val d'Entremont, through the latter of which the route of the Great St. Bernard proceeds. The Dranse, already mentioned, is a mountain torrent, formed by the conflux, near St. Branchier, of a stream from each of these valleys. It is remarkable for the rapidity and force of its current, which one would not anticipate on observing the treacherous smoothness of the surface as it flows through Martigny. Like other streams of glacier origin, it is very turbid, and extremely cold.—The year 1818 was rendered memorable at Martigny from the desolating inundation occasioned by this torrent, the dire effects of which were still distinctly traceable when I visited the place. As the circumstances of this catas-

trophe may not be familiar to all, I shall give a brief outline of the most remarkable before proceeding further on our route.

The main body of the Dranse derives its origin from the glacier of Chermontane, and descends by the Val de Bagne to join its twin current from the Great St. Bernard. Early in the year 1818, it was observed that the waters of the Dranse had very much diminished in their channel at Martigny, but the circumstance does not appear to have attracted much attention at first. At length, in the month of April, some individuals, more inquisitive than the rest, ascended the stream to investigate the cause of this unusual phenomenon. To their astonishment and alarm, the mystery was completely solved by the discovery of a lake 12 furlongs in length, formed by the waters of the Dranse accumulated behind a barrier of ice and snow, which, slipping down from the glacier of Getroz, had fallen into a narrow defile of the Val de Bagne, between the mountains Pleurer and Mauvoisin, where it had formed a dike 600 feet high by 400 wide, and supported upon a base of 3,000 feet. Destruction was evidently impending over the slopes beneath, for should this frozen bulwark prove unable to withstand the *vis a tergo*, a sea in its strength would be poured upon the devoted land, bearing ruin and destruction in its track.

In this great emergency an individual was happily found whose skill and enterprise were equal to the occasion. M. Venetz, the public engineer, undertook to tunnel through the barrier, and thus permit the gradual escape of the imprisoned waters. He commenced his arduous task on the 10th of May, on both sides at once, and at the height of 20 yards above the surface of the lake, which level, it was presumed, the waters would not exceed during the period required for the excavation. The work was urged on night and day without intermission, by alternating gangs of miners. All that skill could suggest, or intrepid daring execute, seems to have been developed during the progress of the work; while the most judicious measures were adopted for conveying warning to the country, in case any sudden disruption of the dike should occur. By the 4th of June the perforation had been carried 600 feet through the frozen mass, but unfortunately the two shafts of the tunnel did not meet in the centre, the external one being 20 feet higher than that communicating with the lake. The floor of the former was therefore sunk to a level with the latter, and on the 13th of June the rush of water commenced. The aperture of the outlet was, however, found to be insufficient to give free egress to the flood, which accordingly accumulated above the level of the tunnel; but this fault was speedily remedied by the force and vibration of the torrent, which widened the breach, and favoured its own impetuous exit. In 56 hours the level of the lake was reduced by 30 feet, and as the floor of the gallery was rapidly lowered by the action of the stream, there was every prospect of the water being drained off gradually and with safety. An unforeseen occurrence, however, suddenly defeated all their well-concerted measures, and turned these pleasing anticipations into alarm and consternation. The water, in its descent from the outer aperture of the tunnel, falling with great impetuosity upon the base of the dike, gradually loosened and detached this buttress of the whole superstructure; the icy barrier was no longer able to resist the weight of water behind it; its flood gates were thrown open, and in half an hour the

lake was drained to the bottom! A headlong torrent, estimated at 100 feet in depth, rushed down upon the devoted plain beneath, bearing in its whelming wave blocks of ice, rocks, uprooted trees, cattle, cottages, and human beings. It reached Martigny, a distance of eight leagues, in ninety minutes. Every bridge in its course was swept away, together with 400 cottages, and the greater part of the town of Martigny; but the loss of human life was comparatively small, owing to the measures of precaution which had been adopted. It is calculated that during the half hour which succeeded the bursting of the dike, 530 millions of cubic feet of water passed through the breach, being five times greater in quantity and velocity than the volume and flow of the Rhine at Basle, where the river is 1,300 English feet in width. Upon the gable end of a house in Martigny a broad black line is still visible, ten or twelve feet from the ground, marking the height to which the water rose on that memorable and disastrous occasion.

The scenery between Martigny and St. Branchier is far from interesting: the country is bare and rather desolate, strewed with huge blocks rolled down by the inundation of the Dranse, and exhibiting other traces of the impoverishing influence of that flood. The road in some parts rises high above the bed of the stream, and on looking back at certain points we may obtain extensive views of the Valley of the Rhone, which, seen from a height, presents very much the appearance of having been at some former period the receptacle of a vast lake. After passing through the wretched village of Bouvernier, the road again descends to the Dranse, and runs parallel with it by means of a gallery excavated in the rock, the valley being so narrow at this point as to render the formation of a roadway otherwise impracticable.

At St. Branchier we enter the Val d'Entremont, where the eye is refreshed by the sight of rich and verdant pasturage. The scenery from this to the village of Liddes is very wild and romantic: the road winds through a mountain gorge, or along the slope of some deep ravine. The hills are wooded, with bare pinnacles of rock rising at intervals above the foliage. Corn fields of small dimensions are sprinkled here and there in situations which, viewed from a distance, seem almost inaccessible. It was the season for haymaking, and I observed many of the peasants so engaged; the solemn and steadfast manner in which they laboured at the work, reminded me forcibly, by contrast, of the playful merriment which usually prevails in the hayfields of this country. The hay is carried home upon the backs of mules or the heads of women,—an association in office which certainly did not appear very flattering to the cerebral organs of the fair sex.

At the village of Orsières, about midway between St. Branchier and Liddes, we left our vehicle, and bestrode the mules, which hitherto had acted as chariot horses; it is usual to take the char on to Liddes, but, for reasons which I do not now recollect, we preferred leaving it at an earlier stage. Before reaching Liddes we encountered a procession of peasants, returning from the chapel of St. Lorent, where they had been to pray for rain, the season having been unusually dry. It consisted of about three hundred persons of both sexes, carrying banners, and accompanied by a priest mounted upon a charger. The van was led by the women clad in white, and preceded by three fellows in white shirts, who rang bells and vociferated some-

thing which I could not understand. After the women followed the priest upon a mule, with a square banner carried before him, and the rear was closed by the male peasants, habited in rusty jerkins. A drunken boor, propped up by a woman on each side, formed rather a comical appendix to this religious ceremony. Coming suddenly upon us, in the midst of the wild Alpine scenery, as we turned an angle of the road, this rude pageant was picturesque and interesting in a high degree; and as the procession moved down the winding descent, the voices of the singers echoing fainter from the rocks, and the banners and white dresses of the women fluttering in the breeze, I thought of the days of Tell and Winklereid, and fancy pictured in the scene before me the march of some warlike host, it might be returning with song and triumph from a field of victory.

At the village of Liddes, which is six leagues distant from Martigny, and nearly half way to the Hospice, we remained for an hour and a half to refresh ourselves and our steeds, being considerably fatigued both by the heat of the sun and the effort of the journey. I can assure those who have not had experience in the matter, that it is no sinecure to ride a mule, especially if your desire for progression happens, as is frequent, considerably to exceed its own; and whether the organ of benevolence permits or denies the free application of the cudgel, the patience is severely tried by the pangs of hope deferred. I had a practical illustration of these remarks in the conduct of my companion, whose burning zeal far outstripped the tardy movements of his phlegmatic steed; and, having exhausted his strength by unavailing thwackings of the patient quadruped, he threw himself from its back upon the ground, vowing that it would be infinitely less fatiguing to carry the mule than to be carried by it upon such terms.

In about half an hour after quitting Liddes we passed through the small village of Alève, which, for squalid wretchedness, far exceeded anything which I had witnessed in the British Isles or upon the continent. The people of this district generally appeared to be sunk in extreme poverty, the effects of which were sufficiently obvious in the miserable appearance presented both by themselves and their dwellings.

The village of Bourg St. Pierre, through which we next passed in our route, is of great antiquity, and contains many relics and inscriptions of the olden time, among which a military column, dedicated to the younger Constantine, is worthy of note. (Constantine II. slain in battle with his brother Constans, at Aquileia, in Italy, A. D. 340.) On quitting the village to ascend the valley, the road passes beneath an antique gateway, built upon the brink of a deep ravine, which is bridged across. As we advance up the valley, the scenery assumes an aspect of wild and savage grandeur; the road through the forest of St. Pierre winding its devious course among old pines, and over fragments of rock, inaccessible except to human foot, or the well-tried hoof of the indefatigable mule. It was here that Napoleon experienced such difficulty in the transport of his artillery, when crossing this pass with the army of reserve, in May, 1800;—and near the termination of the forest he had a narrow escape with his life; having slipped from his mule upon the snow in a dangerous part of the road, he would have fallen over a precipice but for the promptitude and presence of mind of a guide who caught him by the coat.

Emerging from the forest of St. Pierre, we enter upon the plain of Prou, hemmed in by glaciers and lofty mountain peaks, among which Mont Velan, the highest elevation of the St. Bernard, stands pre-eminent. The brawl of the torrent which flows far beneath our feet is here no longer audible, and the scene is one of desolate grandeur, rendered still more imposing by the unbroken stillness which reigns around. A few straggling stunted larches indicate that we have nearly reached the extreme limits of their domain; the rhododendron maintains its ground to a still higher elevation, but even it at length gives way beneath the ungenial temperature and soil, before we arrive at the Hospice, and the mosses and ferns remain the almost sole representatives of the vegetable kingdom.

It was interesting to remark, as we ascended from the genial valley of the Rhone to these frozen altitudes, the gradual and progressive changes which vegetation underwent both in character and luxuriance. The full-grown tree, in rich abundance, dwindling down to the stunted shrub scattered at distant intervals, and these at last giving place to the lowlier specimens of vegetable life, which seemed fain to protract a miserable existence beneath the shelter of a rock, or in the covert of some protected nook. Beyond the plain of Prou the valley is ascended by a steep and dangerous path, where travellers are exposed to avalanches during winter and spring.

About three o'clock, we stopped for a few minutes at a sort of auberge, a veritable hotel in the wilderness, to refresh ourselves with some wine. It was the last human habitation which we saw before reaching the Hospice. From this point to the convent, the aspect of the ground is extremely wild and sterile, patches of snow covered the road in some places to the depth of several feet, and the surrounding hills were plentifully besprinkled. The temperature was sufficiently cool, and formed a striking contrast with the sultry heat of the valley which we had left in the morning.

About a quarter of an hour before reaching the Hospice, we passed two small huts, or chalets, erected by the monks, one for the protection of the living, when overtaken by the storms so frequent in these regions, the other for the reception of the dead. These structures are named l'Hôpital, and in the dangerous season are regularly visited by the brethren of the Convent, or by their servants and dogs, to search for and assist travellers, or to leave refreshments in the hut for their behoof. I took a glance into the dead house, and saw a considerable quantity of bones, and one dark leathern-looking body, which the cold had dried and preserved like a mummy. It was lying in a strange distorted attitude, probably retaining the position in which it had been found.

Before reaching the Convent the river is crossed by the Pont du Nudri, and at the base of a short but rather steep ascent we came in sight of the roof of the Hospice, appearing above the crest of the pass. Here we were obliged to dismount, and struggle on foot through a patch of snow, of considerable depth, which few seasons are favourable enough to melt; and at half-past four o'clock, after a journey of ten and a-half hours, we reached our destination, and were welcomed by the brethren of St. Bernard to their dwelling in the clouds.

The external appearance of the Convent is neither interesting nor inviting,

and I must confess that my picturesque anticipations received a severe shock on first coming in sight of the very plain, and even common-looking structure of the Hospice. The main building is massive and strong, of an oblong square figure, and three stories in height. The windows are very small, the roof high, pointed, and covered with slates, and the walls are whitewashed. It more nearly resembles a large substantial barn than anything to which I can compare it.

The Hospice is situated upon the very summit of the pass, in the narrow ravine which divides Mont Mort from its giant neighbour Mont Chenavellaz, one gable being directed towards the N. E. or the Valais, the other pointing to the S. W. or the Italian frontier. From these quarters it is exposed to tremendous blasts, but is sheltered in some measure in other directions by the mountains just named.

The Convent is 8,200 English feet above the level of the sea, and is the highest human habitation of the old world which is regularly occupied during the whole year. On the opposite side of the road from the main building is another smaller structure of more recent date, which is occupied by the domestics, and is used for the reception of travellers when the Hospice is full, and also as a refuge in case of fire, which has twice happened since the foundation of the building. This minor establishment is dignified with the name of the Hôtel de St. Louis, in compliment to the kings of France, whose protection and assistance has often been extended to the monks of St. Bernard. On the other side of the convent is another and still smaller building, which is used as a Morgue, the melancholy contents of which we shall hereafter notice.

The chief building contains sleeping accommodations for 60 or 80 persons, and as many as 300 may obtain assistance and shelter beneath its roof. If we include the additional facilities afforded by the Hotel of St. Louis, we can understand how so great a number of persons as five or six hundred have been assisted in the course of a single day.

We were received at the door of the Hospice by one of the domestics, the monks being all engaged in the chapel, and conducted to the *salle à manger*. In about half an hour one of the brethren came to us, and after a few polite expressions of welcome and congratulation, conveyed in French, invited us to partake of some refreshment. Bread and cheese, and a bottle of excellent wine, were speedily produced, and as promptly despatched by us, with great gusto, I can assure you,—physical exertion and cold air being wonderful quickeners of the appetite. My first impression of the monks was certainly favourable. Our entertainer, though somewhat rough and unpolished in his outward appearance, was quiet and polite in manner and address, and exhibited a calm gravity of demeanour, which well comported with his sombre monastic garb. Having finished our repast, the monk conducted us to a bed-chamber, and with some well-turned expressions of good-will left us to our reflections.

The main entrance to the Hospice is reached by a flight of steps, and conducts to what may be termed the first floor, an arrangement rendered necessary by the depth of the snow in winter, which frequently lies seven or eight feet high, and is drifted even to a level with the roof of the building. The ground floor is used as stables and a store-room for wood. A long corridor

leads from the entrance to various offices, and on the floor above, a similar gallery, running nearly the whole length of the building, communicates with the refectory, the separate chambers of the monks, and extensive accommodation for travellers. An iron grill divides the section of the gallery leading to the travellers' apartments from that conducting to the dormitories of the monks. The house was very clean, but cold; the brick floors of the galleries, and the whitewashed walls, extending in long vista before the eye as we ascended to our bed-room, conveyed an impression of severe discomfort and carnal mortification by no means grateful to the soul of an Englishman. Our dormitory exhibited the same air of stern simplicity in its furniture and arrangements. The bed-curtains were of red and white striped cotton, the mattress and pillows were extremely hard, and the sheets very coarse, but they all possessed the redeeming qualities of cleanliness. A coverlet, stuffed with down, was placed upon each bed, the consolatory qualities of which we found to be most grateful during the cold of the ensuing night.

Having rested a while after the fatigues of the ascent, and spent a few minutes at the toilet, I sauntered out alone to survey the desolate scene around, and pass the hour which still intervened till the evening repast should assemble us in the *salle à manger*. I directed my steps toward the Italian frontier, which commences within a few hundred yards of the Hospice. The road descends rapidly from the convent to the margin of a small lake, along which it winds. Patches of snow lay in thick profusion on every side, and large masses of ice were floating in the water of the lake, which seemed of Stygian blackness, from the deep shadows of the impending mountains. In several sheltered corners I observed small spots of cultivated ground, in which a few miserable kitchen vegetables were struggling into a brief and precarious existence, their doubtful domain was defended by walls of stone, and the melted snow conveyed to their roots by wooden aqueducts. It was amusing and interesting to remark these small contrivances of human skill, by which doubtless the monks succeeded in beguiling a weary hour. I prolonged my stroll to where the road begins to descend to St. Remy and the city of Aoste on the Italian side, and as the eye instinctively followed its tortuous windings towards the valleys of Piedmont, the painful history of the Waldenses arose to my recollection, and I thought of those guiltless victims of so many sanguinary persecutions, whose "bones lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold."

Returning from this spot to the extremity of the little lake furthest from the Hospice, I sat down upon a large stone in a musing melancholy mood, to survey the dreary scene before me. Two monks were sauntering in the distance, apparently inspecting the progress of their horticultural operations, their dark figures appearing in strong relief upon the whiteness of the background, and the last rays of the setting sun were lighting up the snow-clad mountains with a wintry smile. I could not but be forcibly impressed with the strength of the principle, be it true or false, which could induce human beings voluntarily to immure themselves in such a prison-house, as well as the power of habit which could render a life so dreary, not only endurable but even pleasant and desirable. However, this is but one side of the picture: for, although denied the amenities of natural beauty, these hermits of the clouds are by no means cut off from the society of their fellow-men, or de-

prived of the pleasures of social intercourse. Scarcely a day elapses, even in the depth of winter, in which many individuals of the lower classes, chiefly workmen, or pedlars and smugglers, do not pass the Hospice on their way from the Swiss valleys into Italy; and in summer the visitors are very numerous, and of all ranks, especially during late years, when the facilities of travelling are so much increased, and the disposition of mankind to run to and fro upon the earth, appears to have been proportionably augmented.

What a busy and bustling scene the Hospice must have presented in May, 1800, when the modern Hannibal crossed the pass with his armed bands, to pour them in hostile irruption upon the smiling plains of Lombardy. How must these dreary solitudes have been startled from their silent repose by the echoing march of such a vast array! The army of reserve under Napoleon, amounting to 30,000 men, crossed the Great St. Bernard between the 15th and 21st of May, on their way to the field of Marengo. They halted in detachments at the Hospice, where the monks had spread a table in the wilderness, and supplied each soldier with a glass of wine and provisions for three days,—substantial gifts, which their great leader subsequently repaid with more of fair speeches than good deeds.

But it is time to cut short our musings, and adjourn to the *salle à manger*, where supper was prepared at half-past six o'clock. There were nine or ten monks present and three visitors, besides ourselves, but none of them were ladies. The Prior presided at the head of the table and said grace in Latin, after which we proceeded to dinner. It being Friday, and consequently a fast according to the Romish Church, no animal food was produced, but we did not lack in abundance and variety of comestibles, the cooking of which plainly showed that the science of gastronomy was not wholly unknown even in the *cuisine* of the Great St. Bernard. We had soup, and fish dressed in different ways, vegetables, and eggs, with divers specimens of the pudding genus, and last, though not least, most excellent wine of Italian growth. The monks were very attentive to their visitors during the repast, helping us to wine and whatever we seemed to require. My friend, who had been much overcome by the fatigue of the journey, became faint during dinner, and was obliged to leave the table. Two of the brethren accompanied him to his bedroom, and were most obliging, as he afterwards informed me, in ministering to his necessities.

There was no lack of conversation during supper, and as we all spoke French, it was carried on in that language. The monks, though illiterate-looking men, we found to be by no means ignorant, and on some subjects certain of them displayed an inquisitiveness and intelligence which their appearance did not betoken. The opportunities which they enjoy of intercourse with well-informed travellers must be various and frequent during their short summer, and its consequences were apparent in the propriety of their inquiries, and the interest which they seemed to take in the affairs of the world at large. They possess a tolerable library, and are supplied with the periodical works of some academic institutions. Several of the brethren have also been distinguished for their zeal in the cultivation of the natural sciences, but to this we shall revert again.

The number of monks usually resident at the Hospice is from 12 to 14, and none of those we saw appeared to be above the age of forty. Most of them,

I should say, were several years younger. They enter upon their duties at eighteen, and engage to devote fifteen years to works of active benevolence in these desolate regions, but few are robust enough to accomplish this term without experiencing its effects in impaired health or a broken constitution.

We did not inquire into the state of their funds, but Broekedon, who visited the Hospice since the fall of Napoleon, says that they were then in a flourishing condition, nor are they likely to have declined since that period, as the number of visitors able to bestow donations has much increased, and few who can afford it probably quit the Hospice without having deposited in the offertory some substantial mark of their gratitude. The system of purveyance appears to be well regulated, but great difficulty must frequently be experienced in carrying it into effect, as all their supplies are brought from a distance. Food and wine are chiefly obtained from the city of Aoste on the Italian side, a distance of seventeen miles, from whence they are brought on the backs of men or mules; and fuel, one of the most important articles of their domestic economy, must be sought for principally in the forest of Ferret, at the distance of ten miles, as not a stick is grown within a league and a half of the Hospice. About thirty horses and mules are employed during the three or four months of summer in bringing in an adequate supply for the long winter.

The consumption of wood for fuel must necessarily be great, from the excessive cold which prevails during so large a portion of the year; but there is an additional cause, which might not occur to every one, arising out of the great elevation of the Convent above the sea level. From this circumstance, the boiling point of water is lowered from 212° to 190° , a temperature so much less favourable to the coction of meat, that nearly five hours are required to effect what might be accomplished in three at the ordinary heat of boiling water. Some saving has, I believe, been effected in the economy of fires, by circulating hot air in tubes through the building.

The brethren of St. Bernard are regular canons of the order of Augustinian Monks, one of the four classes of mendicants; called also "Austin Friars,"—originally hermits, Pope Alexander VI. first congregated them into one body under their general, Lampane, in 1256. Their number is not limited, but usually varies from twenty to thirty; of these, as already noticed, twelve or fourteen reside in the convent, eight occupy the cures attached to the establishment, and several, disabled by age or infirmity, are located with the Provost at Martigny.

The Superior of the Convent bears the title of Provost, and is crossed and mitred. He is elected by the Chapter, and the post is held during life. Those alone are eligible to the dignity, who have devoted their youth to the exercise of hospitality in the Convent; and, when elected, permission is granted them to reside at Martigny. Next in rank to the Provost is the Claustal Prior, who resides constantly in the Hospice, and governs the community. The other subordinate officers are named as follows:—the Saeristan, whose duty it is to take care of the chapel, and all matters connected with religious worship:—the Cellierier, or commissary, who provides the supply of food and other necessities, and superintends the management of all external affairs:—the Clavandier, or steward, who dispenses from the store-rooms whatever is required by the brethren or travellers:—and the

Infirmier, or nurse, who takes charge of the sick. These offices are held only for three years.

The dress of the monks is of black cloth, reaching nearly to the ankle, and buttoned from top to bottom; and a black conical cap, surmounted by a tuft, is worn upon the head. The distinguishing badge of the order is a very narrow white band or scarf, which, by a slit, is passed round the neck, and the ends fastened before and behind in a girdle which encircles the waist. The whole costume is simple and becoming.

At the conclusion of supper, the monks withdrew; for although we found them both kind and polite when their attentions were required, they do not take much trouble in entertaining their guests, but leave each one to do very much as he pleases. As there were no ladies present on this occasion, we did not adjourn to the drawing-room,—for the Hospice possesses an apartment which may be so designated,—containing a piano-forte, books, prints, pictures, and various objects of literature and art, which the bounty of travellers has supplied.

I walked out to the door to ascertain how the desolate scenery looked in the grey evening light. One of the younger monks joined me, and proving extremely communicative, I obtained from him many of the following details. He was accompanied by a very fine dog, which he commended as being extremely sagacious. It was of a greyish black colour, and in size and figure resembled a Newfoundland of pure breed, being perhaps somewhat longer in body, and very strongly made in the forequarters. The head was large, with a good development of the reflective organs and benevolence, as phrenologists would say. The ears were rather long, and the chops large and pendulous like those of a pointer. I was struck with the sagacious and benevolent expression of the animal's countenance, and the sedate and solemn gravity of its demeanour, qualities which more or less distinguished all the specimens of the breed which I saw. Six dogs are kept at the Hospice, never more, and a supply when necessary is obtained from Martigny, where they are bred, and allowed to remain till of sufficient age to be trained for their peculiar duties. They are all large handsome looking animals, excellent feeders I was informed, extremely gentle, and evidently quite accustomed to the society of strangers.

The dogs are never sent out in the snow by themselves, with food and other necessaries suspended to their necks, as we sometimes see them represented, but are always accompanied either by one of the brethren or a domestic. From November till May, a confidential servant, termed *Le Marronnier*, accompanied by dogs, and armed with a long staff to probe the snow drifts, makes an excursion every day along the route where most danger is apprehended, in search of any who may require his aid; and the same functionary precedes the travellers who are quitting the Hospice half way down the descent, when the state of the weather renders a guide desirable.

On inquiring of my companion how he liked his present mode of life, he replied, that at first he found it rather melancholy work, but a residence of three years in the Hospice had reconciled him to it, and now he rather preferred it. Some, he said, had resided as long as twenty-five years; but many were obliged to leave, being unable to endure the severity of the climate. They spent their time, he further remarked, when not occupied in attending

upon travellers, either in religious duties or in study, and sometimes in sliding upon the snow.

A few remarks upon the climate which prevails at the Hospice will be appropriate here, as a knowledge of its peculiarities is essential to our understanding either the dangers to which travellers are exposed in crossing the pass, or the risks which the monks must run in hastening to their succour.

The convent is very near the line of perpetual snow—it is overhung by mountains whose icy covering never melts, and its position in the gorge of the pass, open to every breath which blows from the north-east and south-west, renders the effect of a low temperature still more perceptible. The cold in winter, which lasts during nine months of the year, is excessive, and thick fogs are almost perpetual. The thermometer has frequently been observed at 18° and 20° below zero of Fahrenheit, and however endurable this degree of cold may be with a perfectly still atmosphere, the effects of a breeze at such a low temperature must be paralyzing to the human frame. The severest cold recorded is -29° of Fahrenheit, and the greatest heat $+68^{\circ}$, but even in the height of summer it always freezes in the morning. Saussure relates, that on the 1st August, 1767, at one p.m., he observed the thermometer to stand at -1 , although the sun was only obscured by passing clouds, and its rays often fell upon the bulb of his instrument. In the summer of 1816, the ice upon the lake adjacent to the Hospice never melted, and not a week elapsed without a fresh fall of snow.

Notwithstanding these natural obstacles to human enterprise, the number of travellers is very great, so many as seven or eight thousand being received and assisted at the Hospice annually; and my companion assured me that even in the depth of winter scarcely a day passed without some individual visiting the convent from the Swiss or Italian side. During the famine which affected France and Switzerland in the year 1772, mules laden with grain, to the number of 300, have passed the Hospice in a single day.

The snow storms which prevail in these high regions are in some respect peculiar. From the lowness of the temperature, the snow congeals as it falls into small hard particles, which, instead of consolidating beneath the foot of the traveller rise around him like powder. Whirlwinds, appropriately termed *tourmentes*, sweep up the snow in clouds,—the traveller is buried to his waist,—blinded, he loses his way and falls over a precipice, or, exhausted and benumbed, he sinks upon the ground to perish.

The avalanches also have numerous victims, and the approach to the convent on the Valais side is very dangerous, on this account, at certain seasons of the year. The spring avalanches are occasioned by the melting of the lower beds of snow, by which that deposited at a higher level, being deprived of its support, descends. Those of winter are produced by the accumulation of snow upon the steep sides of mountains, and having little cohesion it becomes at last unable to sustain its own weight, when enormous masses slide off into the valleys beneath, with a suddenness and violence which the Prior compared to the discharge of a cannon-ball. Some of these avalanches fall with great regularity, on particular localities, at certain seasons of the year, and can therefore generally be avoided; but a thousand circumstances may conspire to occasion their descent, where they could neither be anticipated nor escaped from.

Members of the Convent and their domestics have both occasionally been sufferers from these terrible visitations, and perished in the effort to save the lives of others. On the 17th of December, 1825, three domestics of the Hospice, with two dogs, having descended to the Vacherie, on the Italian side of the pass, were returning with a traveller, when an avalanche overwhelmed them. All perished except one of the dogs, which escaped by its prodigious strength, after having been rolled to some distance. The bodies of the victims were not recovered till the snow melted on the following summer. One of the unfortunates was Victor, a fine old domestic of the Convent. The year before I visited the Hospice, a courier, with a servant and two dogs, all belonging to the establishment, perished beneath an avalanche on the Valais side of the pass. The number of victims from these mishaps is, however, by no means so great as might be supposed from the difficulties of the route and the severity of the climate. The accurate knowledge which the monks and their servants possess of the situations in which danger is likely to assail the traveller, and the constant watch which they maintain in case of storms, enables them to save the lives of very many who, but for their timely aid, would swell the list of sufferers. The sagacity of the dogs also, on occasions of difficulty and danger, contributes not a little to diminish the number of casualties. It is astonishing with what precision these intelligent animals will follow the line of route, although it is buried many feet under the snow; and, as if conscious of the peculiar nature of their duties, will range about on each side of the road, searching beneath the snow with paws and nose for any unfortunate who may have dropped by the way.

The twilight of evening was now darkening into the deeper shadows of night, and the snow-clad peaks were gleaming in their gigantic proportions, like spectres in the surrounding gloom. I retired to my chamber with no very lively anticipations of comfort. On trying the temperature with a thermometer outside of the window, I found it to be 46° , while at Martigny it would probably be 70° or 80° . The sudden transition from such extremes rendered one more than usually sensible to the change, and I felt as cold as in Paris in the dead of winter. The water in the bed-room to wash in was painfully cold to the hand. I lay awake for some time, notwithstanding the fatigues of the previous day, impressed with the novelty of my position in this the loftiest habitation of Europe, and awed by the unbroken stillness which reigned around.

Soon after four o'clock next morning I was awake by the sound of music, and on listening heard the deep voices of the monks chaunting in the chapel, and a fine-toned organ, touched by a skilful hand, was pouring a flood of harmony through the echoing corridors of the building. There was something unearthly in this choral symphony—heard at such an hour and in such a situation, it fell upon the ear with startling effect—and its practised strains seemed wholly foreign to the savage wildness of an Alpine fastness.

We came down stairs about half-past seven, and found that the other travellers had already departed; so we breakfasted alone, being waited upon by one of the younger monks. He afterwards conducted us to what may be termed the museum, containing specimens of the minerals, plants, and other natural productions of the surrounding district, principally collected by a former prior, M. Meurith, who was a zealous student of natural history.

At the period of Saussure's visit to the Hospice he was accompanied by Liddes, and frequently accompanied that distinguished naturalist in his excursions. In the cabinet are also deposited many interesting relics, obtained from the ancient Temple of Jupiter on this mountain, such as votive tablets, and figures in bronze and other metals, arms, and coins. Among the latter is a gold coin of Lysimachus (King of Thrace, 332, B. C.) in fine preservation. From the museum we proceeded to the library, which contains a good collection of books, chiefly theological. I noticed several English works upon various subjects; and among the theological, a good copy of Augustine's works in Latin, in 16 vols., 4to., printed at Venice. We next visited the chapel, which presents nothing worthy of notice, except a monument to Dessaix, who fell at the battle of Marengo. It was erected by order of Napoleon, and he laid the first stone himself. In conducting us through the chapel, the monk took care that we should pass the treasury box, in which we deposited a votive offering to their hospitality. It is a delicate mode of reminding one of their necessities, as no recompense is ever demanded.

Before quitting the Hospice I paid a visit to the Morgue, which is a low building, with an open grated window, situated at a little distance from the eastern extremity of the convent. In it are deposited the remains of those who have perished on the mountain, as interment would be impracticable in the frozen and rocky soil. The bodies speedily wither and dry up, from the rapid evaporation which takes place at this elevation, and are thus preserved for years, retaining the posture, and sometimes the dress, in which they have been found. On looking in I observed a great quantity of bones, white and broken, probably the accumulation of centuries. There were about a dozen bodies, all of them dried like mummies. Two of them I particularly remarked. One was placed upright in a corner; his glazed eyes still beamed with a wild glare, and he seemed to be looking anxiously forward; a piece of white garment half covered his head, and was drawn round the body by one arm; his brow was contracted, and the whole appearance suggested the idea of a man perishing from intense cold; the other arm supported a figure which seemed to be kneeling, whether male or female I could not determine; the head was thrown back, and the attitude was expressive of hopeless despair. It was a horrible sight, and conveyed more forcibly than words could do, a tale of suffering and woe. What a fine subject it would have afforded to a painter of imaginative genius, and how striking the effect, if these ghastly lineaments had been portrayed upon canvas!

At half-past eight, a. m. we bade adieu to the good brethren of St. Bernard, and set out for Martigny, which we reached at five in the evening, thinking ourselves well repaid for the fatigue of the journey, and bearing away a most pleasing remembrance of the Hospice and its inmates.

